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IMPERIAL CORONATION CEREMONIES OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES

BY A. E. R. BOAK

IN the mass of material which Constantine VII, Porphyrogenitus, assembled in his work on the Imperial Ceremonies lie certain excerpts from the *περὶ πολιτικῆς καταστάσεως* of Peter the Patrician, Master of the Offices under Justinian.¹ Among these fragments are some descriptions of imperial *ἀναγορεύσεις* or proclamations, dating from the end of the fifth and the early sixth centuries, recorded by Peter for the guidance of future sovereigns.² Although these ceremonies have not been altogether neglected by students familiar with the historical sources of this period,³ nevertheless they deserve more attention than they have generally received, because of their value in illustrating contemporary opinion regarding the source and character of the imperial power. Therefore in the following pages I have given a summary of the proceedings upon each of these occasions, and then endeavored to show what general conclusions may be drawn therefrom as to the constitutional position of the Roman Emperor at the period in question.

I. THE PROCLAMATION OF LEO I⁴

After the senate had voted in favor of Leo, the officials, the scholars or palace guard, and the soldiers assembled in the Campus Martius. The *labara* and other standards rested upon the ground. The multitude then called for Leo as Emperor in the name of the state, the senate, the army, the palace and the people. Leo, at that time a

¹ Cf. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, 293. *De Caerimoniis*, I, 84 ff.

² *De Caer.* I, 91 fin.

³ Cf. Bury, *The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire*; Sickel, "Das byzantinische Krönungsrecht," *Byz. Zeitschrift*, 1898; Brightman, "Byzantine Imperial Coronations," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1901.

⁴ 457 A.D. *De Caer.*, I, 91, 410.

comes and a tribune of the Mattiarii,¹ was then brought in and ascended the tribunal. Thereupon Bousalgus, a *campiductor*,² placed on his head a soldier's chain (*μανιάκης*, *torques*), while Olympius, also a campiductor, put another on his right arm. The standards were raised at once and all acclaimed Leo as Augustus, appointed by God and under God's protection. On the tribunal itself he assumed the imperial robe and the diadem, and, armed with lance and shield, he received the homage (*προσεκυνήθη*) of the officials in order of rank. Then, through the mouth of a clerk, he addressed the people, styling himself Autocrator Caesar Leo, Victor, Augustus for ever, the appointee of God and the elect of the soldiers, to whom he promised the customary donative. Leo then returned to the city, where he visited, among other places, the church of St. Sophia. There he deposited his crown upon the altar, and as he left the church the (Arch)bishop placed it again upon his head.

After the time of Leo, the imperial proclamations regularly were made within the city, in the Hippodrome.

2. THE PROCLAMATION OF ANASTASIOS³

On the day after the death of Zeno, the officials, senators and (Arch)bishop met in a portico of the palace, while the people and the soldiers assembled in the Hippodrome. To still the clamors of the latter the officials persuaded the widowed Augusta, Ariadne, to go to the Hippodrome and address them. The people demanded an orthodox Emperor, and she, replying through a secretary, stated that in anticipation of their demands, she had ordered the most glorious officials and the sacred senate to select, with the approval of the soldiery, an Emperor, who was a Christian, of Roman birth, and possessed of all royal virtues. This election would be made in the presence of the Gospels publicly exhibited and before the Patriarch of Constantinople. Finally, she nominated a new Urban Prefect. But when the officials and the senate deliberated about a successor they could

¹ *Mattiarii juniores* and *seniores*, two legions of the Palatini, *N. D. Or.* V, 47 and VI, 42 (Seeck). One corps under Leo was stationed at Selymbria, Candidus, *F. H. G.* IV, p. 135.

² A drill-master of high rank.

³ 491 A.D. *De Caer.* I, 92, 417.

reach no decision, and ultimately Urbicius, the Chamberlain (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*), advised giving Ariadne the authority to nominate the new Emperor. The others agreed and asked the Bishop to offer her this power. Thereupon Ariadne chose Anastasius, a silentiary,¹ who was summoned from his home and kept in the palace until the obsequies of the late Emperor were completed. On the next day, the officials and the senate in the presence of the Archbishop took an oath from Anastasius that he would cherish no animosity against his former enemies and that he would govern uprightly and conscientiously. After this Anastasius went up into the imperial box (*κάθισμα*) in the Hippodrome, wearing part of the imperial garb, but without the diadem. The soldiers were drawn up below, with their standards resting on the ground, while the people occupied the seats. Anastasius was then raised standing upon a shield and the campiductor of the Lancearii² placed his own chain upon the Emperor's head, whereupon the standards were raised amid the acclamations of the soldiers and people. Anastasius next descended from the shield and entered the palace, where the Patriarch clad him in the imperial robe (*χλαμύς*) and placed on his head the jeweled crown. He returned to the *kathisma*, greeted the multitude and was hailed as Augustus. Then followed his address to the people, read by a secretary, in which he promised the usual donative to the soldiers and announced that he held the imperial authority as the nominee of the Augusta Ariadne, and the choice of the officials, senate and soldiers, agreed to by the people, under the merciful guidance of the Holy Trinity. After a visit to St. Sophia, Anastasius returned to the palace and promoted to the Urban Prefecture the nominee of Ariadne.

3. THE PROCLAMATION OF JUSTIN I³

Anastasius died at night and as there was no surviving Emperor or Augusta to assume the reins of power or suggest a successor, the Silentaries sent word to Celer, the Master of the Offices, and Justin,

¹ *Silentiarii*, a corps of thirty personal attendants of the Emperor, under the Grand Chamberlain.

² *Lancearii seniores* and *juniores*, legions of the Palatini at Constantinople, *N. D. Or.* V, 42 and VI, 47 (Seeck).

³ 519 A.D. *De Caer.* I, 93, 426.

the Commander of the Bodyguard (*comes excubitorum*) to come to the palace. Upon their arrival the former summoned the *candidati*¹ and the other scholars, the latter called together the soldiers, the tribunes, the *vicarii*, and the seniors of the bodyguard.² Each announced the death of the Emperor and urged the necessity of their taking council in common to choose an Emperor pleasing to God and useful to the state. At dawn the officials assembled and the populace gathered in the Hippodrome, appealing to the senate for an Emperor. And when the officials, with the Archbishop, were disputing over various candidates, Celer advised them to act quickly or others would make a nomination in which they would have to concur. And first the bodyguard proclaimed as Emperor a tribune named John and raised him on a shield, but the faction of the Veneti (Blues) disapproved and stoned him and his supporters, while some of their own number were shot by the guards. Next the scholars raised upon a table in a chamber of the palace a patrician, who was also a Master of the Soldiers (*magister militum*), and intended to crown him, but the guards set upon them, took him and would have put him to death but for the intervention of Justinian, then a *candidatus*. Then the guards tried to compel Justinian to accept the crown but he excused himself. Finally, the senators agreed upon Justin. Some of the scholars opposed to him attacked and wounded him, but the decision of the senators, backed by the soldiers and the populace, for the factions of the Blues and the Greens (Prasinoi) supported him, prevailed. The chamberlains then sent the imperial robes which they had refused to deliver to the supporters of the other nominees. Justin ascended the *kathisma* in the Hippodrome and, elevated upon a shield, received the soldier's chain which was placed upon his head by Godila, the campiductor of the Lanciarii. The raising of the standards followed, and Justin donned the imperial garb. The Bishop placed the crown on his head and, taking lance and shield, he reascended the *kathisma*, where the people saluted him as Augustus. There followed the usual address to the people, read by a secretary, wherein the Emperor asserts his right to the Basileia as the elect of God Almighty, chosen by all acting in unison. The ceremony terminated as in the case of Anastasius.

¹ A *schola* of Palace Guards named from their white uniforms.

² The *excubitores*, a corps of 300, organized by Leo I.

4. THE PROCLAMATION OF LEO II¹

When Leo I was fatally ill, he was induced to appoint as co-Emperor his grandson, who had already been made Caesar. On November 16, 473, the populace and legates from various peoples assembled in the Hippodrome, where the soldiers stood in ranks with their standards. The populace in Greek, and the soldiers in Latin, called for the Emperor to appear. He came escorted by the senators and began to address the assembly, which besought him to crown the new Emperor. He promised to do so and then they shouted to send the Master of the Offices and the patricians to bring in the Caesar, which he ordered done. The Caesar was introduced and placed on the Emperor's left, while the Bishop stood on his right and offered prayer. Then the Emperor, taking the crown from the chamberlain, placed it upon the head of the Caesar. The Bishop departed and the senior Emperor took his seat. The new Emperor saluted the people who hailed him as Augustus. After the Urban Prefect and the senate had made him the usual present of a crown of gold he addressed the soldiers, promising them the customary donative.

5. THE PROCLAMATION OF JUSTINIAN²

When Justin I was lying seriously ill, upon the advice of the senate, he proclaimed Justinian co-Emperor in the Great Triclinium of the palace. On April 4th, 525, Justin ordered an audience to be held in the building of the palace called the Delphax, where the scholars and all the corps of soldiers were assembled. The Bishop was present, offered prayer, and crowned Justinian. Everything else passed off as at the coronation of Leo II, except that it took place in the Delphax and not in the Hippodrome.

Disregarding the significance of many interesting features of these inaugural ceremonies, some of which have been omitted from the above synopsis, I propose to direct attention to two points; namely, the powers which appointed the Emperor and the meaning of the change in the coronation ceremonial illustrated by the examples already given in detail.

¹ 473 A.D. *De Caer.* I, 94, 431.

² 525 A.D. *De Caer.* I, 95, 432.

It will have been noticed that we are here dealing with two distinct types of ceremonies. The one, which is illustrated by the first three instances, was that employed in the proclamation of an Emperor when the throne had become vacant; the other, that of the remaining two examples, when a second Emperor was appointed by the Augustus then on the throne. We shall discuss each of these forms in turn.

First, then, the nomination to a vacant throne, as in the cases of Leo I, Anastasius, and Justin I. Upon all three occasions the right of nomination was exercised by the officials and the senate, acting together. This nomination was approved by the soldiers and acquiesced in by the populace of Constantinople.

Who these officials were, we are not told specifically, for they are designated by the non-committal name of ἀρχοντες. However, there can be little doubt that they were the holders of the higher *dignitates palatinae*: the members of the imperial consistory or council of state and occupants of other military and civil offices which required their constant presence at the seat of government. Most probably this group included only those whose offices entitled them to the *Illustrissimate*, the highest of the grades of rank open to the officials of the later empire. Among those who played prominent parts at various nominations we have specifically mentioned the Master of the Offices, the Grand Chamberlain and the Count of the Bodyguard.

With these officials there met in joint council the senate. Now from about the middle of the fifth century the imperial senate consisted only of those members of the senatorial order who had attained the *Illustrissimate*.¹ Thus the senate was an aggregate of officers and ex-officers who had attained the highest positions in the imperial service, as well as others whose influence had secured for them this coveted grade of rank. It had become an assemblage of imperial functionaries: an enlarged consistory.¹ The joint meeting of the officials and the senate was, therefore, nothing more than a gathering of the most influential members of the official class.

This was the body, then, that had the right to make nominations to the vacant throne and, under normal conditions, was regularly able to secure recognition for its candidate. Not only could it exercise this right itself, but it could also delegate it to others, as it did to the

¹ L'écrivain, *Le sénat romain depuis Diocétien*, 64 ff.

Augusta Ariadne when seeking a successor to Zeno. But even under these circumstances the nomination was regarded as that of the officials and senate. However, these were well aware that they enjoyed no exclusive prerogative of nomination. For, upon the death of Anastasius, the Master of the Offices and the Count of the Bodyguard informed the candidati, scholars and guardsmen of the necessity of their all taking counsel to find a suitable successor. Further, Celer, the Master, impressed upon the senate the need of reaching a decision quickly, before a candidate was nominated elsewhere. And, in fact, before the officials agreed upon Justin, both the bodyguard and the scholars had put forward candidates, who, however, had been unable to overcome the determined opposition of rival factions.

It is apparent, therefore, that even the candidate who was the nominee of the officials and the senate had to have the support of the soldiery to make his election secure. From the instances detailed above we have seen that the most prominent representatives of this element were the scholars or palace guards, and the excubitores or imperial bodyguards. But these were by no means the only troops concerned. In the neighborhood of the capital, under the command of the Masters of the Soldiers in the Presence (*magistri militum praesentales*) were stationed detachments of the Palatini, who formed part of the mobile forces of the later empire. At the opening of the fifth century these comprised 12 legions and 35 other infantry corps called *auxilia*. With these were associated 13 cavalry units (*vexillationes*) from the Comitatus, who, like the Palatini, were under the orders of the Masters of the Soldiers.¹ Allowing, with Mommsen,² an average of 1000 men to each of these corps, we get a total of some 60,000 as the nominal strength of the imperial troops stationed near Constantinople. And, although their effective strength may at this time have fallen far below that total, they formed a very considerable army conveniently located for participation in public ceremonies of this nature. Unquestionably they supplied the bulk of the troops who were present at the inauguration of the Emperors.

Unlike the soldiery, the populace of the capital had no recognized right to nominate an Emperor. It sat in the Hippodrome, as at the

¹ *Notitia Dignitatum* Or. V and VI (Seeck).

² "Das römische Militärwesen seit Diocletian," *Hermes*, 24, 195 ff.

horse races, divided in its factions of Blues and Greens, and awaited the announcement of the choice of the officials and soldiers. This opportunity the people used to complain against the grievances under which they suffered or against officials who had oppressed them, and also to demand an orthodox ruler. When a candidate for the throne was presented to them they expressed their approval by acclamations, their disapproval by rioting; but we have no reason to suppose that they could have forced the rejection of one who was solidly backed by the senate and the army.

It was with justice, therefore, that the Emperors who were raised to the throne in this manner declared that they had attained their power by the election of the officials, the senate, and the army, with the sanction of the people. This was the immediate source of their authority. Thus, as in the principate, so in the later empire, it was the senate and the army who appointed the wielder of the *imperium*, although both senate and army of the sixth resembled merely in name those of the first century.

We now come to the second type of inaugural ceremonies; that involved in the appointment of a Junior Emperor by the Augustus already on the throne. The procedure here differs materially from that in the instances considered above. And the reason therefor is not hard to seek, for in this case the nomination and appointment alike come from the ruling sovereign. It is true that such an appointment may be made upon the advice of the senate, but, whatever deference may be paid to the feelings of the officials and the army, the latter are not formally consulted as to their choice.

Thus the constitutional practice of the later empire recognized both election and coöptation to the throne. Election guaranteed a high average of ability among the Emperors: coöptation recognized the strength of dynastic claims. However, it is to be noted that neither the son of an Emperor nor any other member of his family had a right to the throne by virtue of his birth, but only by the will of the Augustus expressed in the act of nomination.

The consummation of the appointment to the imperial dignity was the act of coronation, which was followed by the assumption of the imperial regalia and the salutation as Augustus from the people and soldiers. From the instances before us we see that the coronation

ceremony underwent a transformation between 457 and 519 A.D. In the case of Leo I the significant incident is the coronation by the campiductor with a soldier's chain. Immediately thereafter the standards were raised and Leo was acclaimed as Augustus. His recognition as Emperor was therefore complete and what followed was of subsidiary importance. It was afterwards that he put on the diadem, which, during his visit to St. Sophia, he laid upon the altar, whence it was placed upon his head by the patriarch. But this reception of the diadem from the latter's hand did not form an essential part of the inaugural ceremony. With Anastasius, the raising of the standards likewise followed the coronation with the *torques*. But then came the assumption of the imperial insignia in the palace, where the Patriarch crowned him with the jeweled crown, and it was not until after he had again entered the *kathisma* that he was hailed as Augustus. The procedure was exactly the same in the case of Justin, except that the coronation with the diadem took place in the Hippodrome itself. By this time the coronation with the diadem had become as integral a part of the inauguration as the coronation with the *torques*.

The inauguration of Leo I was the old military ceremony, such as was regularly employed when an Emperor was proclaimed by his troops in camp or in the field, and differed in no essential features from the hasty coronation of Julian as Augustus at Paris in 360, so vividly described for us by Ammianus.¹ And, in fact, this was the regular usage from the close of the third to the middle of the fifth century. It signified that the Emperor was the choice of the soldiers. The change that was now brought about consisted in placing alongside this ceremony as an integral part of the inauguration the coronation with the diadem at the hands of the Patriarch of Constantinople.

The reasons for this modification are not directly stated, nor is it sufficient to account for it as caused solely by the increasing elaboration of the court ceremonial. But perhaps we may find the true explanation in the significance of the wearing of the diadem. This crown, adorned with jewels, was first adopted by Constantine and his successors, in imitation of the Persian royal regalia, as indicative of the new position of the imperial ruler, already exemplified in Diocletian's assumption of the name Jovius. Henceforth he was to be recognized

¹ Amm. Mar., XX, 4, 14 ff.

as the absolute lord of all his subjects without distinction; the source of his authority both over the Italians and over their one time subjects, the provincials, was to be the same. Thus the diadem symbolized what was expressed by the title *dominus*. For Diocletian, as for the Hellenistic monarchs, this meant that the absolute ruler was deified; while for his Christian successors, the moral justification of their absolute power lay in their claim to be regarded as chosen by God and ruling under his divine guidance and protection. The diadem, consequently, symbolized the power derived from this high source.

Still the question remains, why was this given special stress at the period in question by making the coronation with the diadem an essential part of the inaugural ceremony? Partly, it may be, in an endeavour to accentuate the dignity of the Emperor, to mark him out as something more than the mere nominee of barbarian generals, as had been the later Western Emperors, and also to deter insurrection by emphasizing the divine support of the imperial authority; but still more, it seems to me, because of the union of Church and State in the East which, from the reign of Marcian, grew more and more complete until it culminated a movement culminating in the "Caesaropapism" of Justinian. This alliance was the result of the Council of Chalcedon (451), whereby orthodoxy was assured in the East, the supremacy of the see of Constantinople over those of Alexandria and Antioch definitely established, and the imperial suzerainty recognized in religious affairs.¹ It would only be natural, then, for fresh emphasis to be laid upon the divine source of the Emperor's power and this could best be accomplished by bringing into prominence the conferment of the diadem which symbolized his status as exalted above that of all other mortals.

Here, too, we find the explanation of the rôle of the Patriarch of Constantinople in placing this crown upon the head of the Emperor. That, as Bury has pointed out,² did not signify that the crown was the gift of the Church and its conferment by the Patriarch the mark of the Church's sanction of the election, necessary to complete the

¹ Cf. Gelzer, "Das Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat in Byzanz," *Hist. Zeitschr.*, 1901.

² *Constitution of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 12.

inauguration; but the significance of the act was that the Patriarch (regularly referred to in our sources as the Bishop, less frequently as the Archbishop), being the highest ecclesiastical officer in the state, was the logical person to bestow the symbol which indicated that the emperor ruled "by the grace of God."

It remains to say a word regarding the position of the Empress — the Augusta — at the death of the Emperor. We have seen above the account of the part played by Ariadne, widow of Zeno, in the selection of his successor Anastasius. From this it would seem that at Zeno's death she was regarded as the titular head of the state, for the people declare themselves her slaves (*ἡμεῖς δοῦλοι τῆς Αυγούστης*) and appeal to her for relief from an oppressive official. And she, in her turn, in addressing them, declared that she had ordered the senate and the officials to choose an Emperor, and after removing the officer complained of, she nominated a new Urban Prefect. Later, too, she made the nomination of Anastasius. But, in spite of all this display of power, the Augusta was not regarded as wielding the full imperial authority, for at the beginning of the coronation the standards of the troops were kept lowered to indicate that there was no holder of the military *imperium*. Also, when Ariadne addressed the people she did so upon the suggestion of the senate and officials, upon whom devolved the right of nomination to the vacant throne. Only by their own will did they delegate to her the right to name an Emperor, whereas the ruling Augustus could coöpt a colleague by virtue of his own power. Finally the nomination which Ariadne made to the Urban Prefecture required the confirmation of Anastasius to make it valid. We must recognize, then, that the imperial power at this period did not devolve upon the Augusta at the death of her consort, but her position and personal influence gave her considerable importance and power in the interval before the coronation of the successor to the throne.